

PRINCIPALS' PERSPECTIVE

President Bush in his recently released FY2006 budget, proposes a \$2 billion commitment for high school reform. While this is a significant allocation of resources and while we applaud the President's intention to focus those federal resources on improving America's high schools, the National Association of Secondary School Principals cannot in any way support his budget's complete decimation of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical program, which currently provides over \$1 billion for school-based programs that prepare high school students for postsecondary life—and which apparently represents a significant portion of the "new" money for secondary education.

Federal support for high schools is long overdue and greatly needed, but successful reform cannot be attained through the tactics of taking from Peter to pay Paul! The needs of America's economically diverse high school student population are greater today than ever before and thus require an integrated approach that wedges proven reform strategies to high-quality career/technical programs. One without the other leaves our nation with far too many students left out in the post-high school cold.

Additionally, the administration has stated its' intention to extend the NCLB Act in high school's with a singular focus on testing 9th, 10th, and 11th graders. We sincerely hope that there would be an opportunity for major dialog with the educational community before such an "expansion" is considered. Although NCLB has arguably provided a positive and necessary framework to raise standards and accountability, close the achievement gap, and raise expectations for student progress, the model is flawed in many ways. In its current form, NCLB provides no diagnostic data to improve teaching and learning, overemphasizes a single test as a measure of success, remains unreasonable in its requirements for testing special education students, and fails to provide funding to fully implement the law. Many of these concerns and issues have been raised in a bipartisan way across the country by educators, legislatures, members of Congress, governors, parents, and numerous groups and organizations. Before expanding NCLB into high schools, we should first improve it by addressing the serious problems of the law.

I praise the administration's emphasis on accountability and its desire to provide all students with a high-quality education; however, merely adding more tests to high schools is not the answer. More testing is akin to weighing students rather than providing them the nourishment they need for academic growth. Unfortunately, high-stakes tests are currently used to feed our nation's voracious appetite for test scores, labeling schools, and offering punitive measures to promote change.

There is no question that our nation's high schools need to improve. There also is no question that high schools will not be able to substantially improve until the policymakers recognize the need to provide adequate resources. NASSP is fully supportive of, and committed to high school improvement that reflects the individual learning needs of every student. Furthermore, we take a position that successful high school reform requires long-term strategies and significant resources for implementing systemic improvement and raising individual student and school-wide performance levels.

The federal government has made the investment at the elementary level (just over \$12 billion alone for Title I with only 5% of it going to high schools); it's now time to do the same at the high school level. Congressional action is necessary to establish a specific and ongoing federal role in improving the nation's high schools. If our nation's leaders are truly committed to ensuring a rigorous and quality education for all high school students, they need to demonstrate the commensurate resolve to provide the resource base to achieve their goals. To this end, NASSP issues a challenge calling for \$4.8 billion annually to fund a new high school specific reform initiative. The President's allocation of just over \$2 billion is a good start provided funds aren't cut from Perkins. An outline of our legislative recommendations follows (the full recommendations and rationale can be viewed on our website at www.principals.org):

1. Increase academic rigor for all high school students through programs such as the State Scholars program, Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses.



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2. Replace the federal Smaller Learning Communities program with a "High School Personalization" program that will focus resources on developing personal academic and graduation plans for each student, as they enter high school, that correspond to his/her academic and future employment goals. These personalized plans would rely on robust data systems-applicable at the school level-for individual students. (Including: each student's academic strengths and needs based on diagnostic assessments including reading and math, upon entrance into high school and to serve as indicators of success and areas in need of improvement as they move from 9th grade toward graduation.)
 3. Expand funding for the Striving Readers program to \$1 billion in order to serve the more than 6 million middle level and high school students who are not currently able to read or write at grade level proficiency.
 4. Provide a new and separate funding stream of \$3.55 billion for FY 2006 to address the academic needs of the nation's low-performing high school students. (High schools educate 28% of the K-12 population. However, only 5% of Title I funding reaches high schools. Of the \$12.7 billion appropriated in FY 2005, approximately \$635 million is being directed to high schools.)
 5. Support the use of multiple assessments—that are aligned with state standards and that include performance-based measures—to measure academic outcomes. Encourage states to develop student growth models that measure individual student achievement from year to year. Implement the NAEP Assessment in the 10th grade (Spring) or 11th grade (Fall).
 6. Provide a dedicated funding stream of \$100 million for FY 2006 in Title II of the No Child Left Behind Act specifically designated to build the capacity of principals and other leaders (asst. principal, teacher leaders, and others) to effect meaningful change in their schools.
 7. Support pre-service and in-service efforts to provide teachers with the subject knowledge and pedagogical skills they need to be highly qualified professionals.
 8. Provide technical assistance to all high schools identified as "in need of improvement" under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).
- If these recommendations are fully implemented, what are some of the outcomes that can be expected over time?
- Improvements in closing the achievement gap between whites and minorities, and between high and low-income populations
 - An increase in percentage of students passing state exit exams
 - An increase in the high school graduation rate
 - An increase in the college going rate
 - Improvement in NAEP assessment results based on the 10th grade (Spring) or 11th grade (Fall).
- NASSP is fully committed to high school reform that systemically recultures the American high school through collaborative, inclusive leadership and the strategic use of data, personalized learning that focuses on the academic needs of students, and increased academic rigor that reflects the integration of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. But these changes will need to be supported by a solid investment and a long-term commitment on the part of state and federal policymakers. The cost of such efforts may seem high to some, but it pales in comparison to the human, social and economic costs of not investing in improving our nation's high schools. A wise person once said, "vision without resources is an hallucination."